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Notes On Kabbalah

A Continuing Series Of Many Parts

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Chapter 1.: The Tree Of Life

At the root of the Cabalistic view of the world are three fundamental concepts and they provide a natural place to begin. The three concepts are force, form and consciousness and these words are used in an abstract way, as the following examples illustrate:

- high pressure steam in the cylinder of a steam engine provides a force. The engine is a form which constrains the force.
- a river runs downhill under the force of gravity. The river channel is a form which constrains the water to run in a well defined path.
- someone wants to get to the center of a garden maze. The hedges are a form which constrain that person's ability to walk as they please.
- a diesel engine provides the force which drives a boat forwards. A rudder constrains its course to a given direction.
- a politician wants to change the law. The legislative framework of the country is a form which he or she must follow if the change is to be made legally.
- water sits in a bowl. The force of gravity pulls the water down. The bowl is a form which gives its shape to the water.
- a stone falls to the ground under the force of gravity. Its acceleration is constrained to be equal to the force divided by the mass of the stone.
- I want to win at chess. The force of my desire to win is constrained within the rules of chess.
- I see something in a shop window and have to have it. I am constrained by the conditions of sale (do I have enough money, is it in stock).
- cordite explodes in a gun barrel and provides an explosive force on a bullet. The gas and the bullet are constrained by the form of the gun barrel.

- I want to get a passport. The government won't give me one unless I fill in lots of forms in precisely the right way.
- I want a university degree. The university won't give me a degree unless I attend certain courses and pass various assessments.

In all these examples there is something which is causing change to take place ("a force") and there is something which causes change to take place in a defined way ("a form"). Without being too pedantic it is possible to identify two very different types of example here:

1. examples of natural physical processes (e.g. a falling stone) where the force is one of the natural forces known to physics (e.g. gravity) and the form is some combination of physical laws which constrain the force to act in a well defined way.
2. examples of people wanting something, where the force is some ill-defined concept of "desire", "will", or "drives", and the form is one of the forms we impose upon ourselves (the rules of chess, the Law, polite behavior etc.).

Despite the fact that the two different types of example are "only metaphorically similar", Kabbalists see no fundamental distinction between them. To the Kabbalist there are forces which cause change in the natural world, and there are corresponding psychological forces which drive us to change both the world and ourselves, and whether these forces are natural or psychological they are rooted in the same place: consciousness. Similarly, there are forms which the component parts of the physical world seem to obey (natural laws) and there are completely arbitrary forms we create as part of the process of living (the rules of a game, the shape of a mug, the design of an engine, the syntax of a language) and these forms are also rooted in the same place: consciousness. It is a Cabalistic axiom that there is a prime cause which underpins all the manifestations of force and form in both the natural and psychological world and that prime cause I have called consciousness for lack of a better word.

Consciousness is undefinable. We know that we are conscious in different ways at different times - sometimes we feel free and happy, at other times trapped and confused, sometimes angry and passionate, sometimes cold and restrained - but these words describe manifestations of consciousness. We can define the manifestations of consciousness in terms of manifestations of consciousness, which is about as useful as defining an ocean in terms of waves and foam. Anyone who attempts to define consciousness itself tends to come out of the same door as they went in. We have lots of words for the phenomena of consciousness - thoughts, feelings, beliefs, desires, emotions, motives and so on - but few words for the states of consciousness which give rise to these phenomena, just as we have many words to describe the surface of a sea, but few words to describe its depths. Kabbalah provides a vocabulary for states of consciousness underlying the phenomena, and one of the purposes of these notes is to explain this vocabulary, not by definition, but mostly by metaphor and analogy. The only genuine method of understanding what the vocabulary means is by attaining various states of consciousness in a predictable and reasonably objective way, and Kabbalah provides practical methods for doing this.

A fundamental premise of the Cabalistic model of reality is that there is a pure, primal, and undefinable state of consciousness which manifests as an interaction between force and form. This is virtually the entire guts of the Cabalistic view of things, and almost everything I have to say from now on is based on this trinity of consciousness, force, and form. Consciousness comes first, but hidden within it is an inherent duality; there is an energy associated with consciousness which causes change (force), and there is a capacity within consciousness to constrain that energy and cause it to manifest in a well-defined way (form).

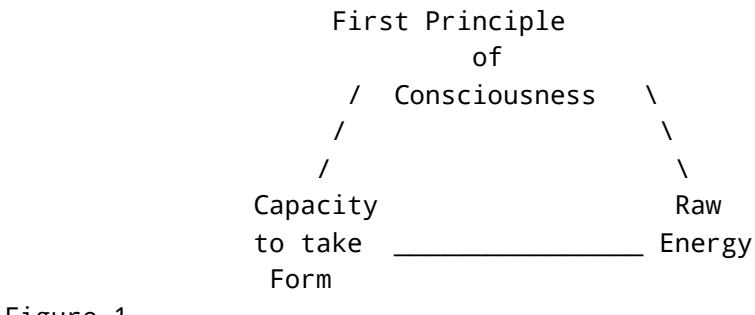

Figure 1.

What do we get out of raw energy and an inbuilt capacity for form and structure? Is there yet another hidden potential within this trinity waiting to manifest? There is. If modern physics is to be believed we get matter and the physical world. The cosmological Big Bang model of raw energy surging out from an infinitesimal point and condensing into basic forms of matter as it cools, then into stars and galaxies, then planets, and ultimately living creatures, has many points of similarity with the Cabalistic model. In the Big Bang model a soup of energy condenses according to some yet-to-be-formulated Grand-Universal-Theory into our physical world. What Kabbalah does suggest (and modern physics most certainly does not!) is that matter and consciousness are the same stuff, and differ only in the degree of structure imposed - matter is consciousness so heavily structured and constrained that its behavior becomes describable using the regular and simple laws of physics. This is shown in Fig. 2. The primal, first principle of consciousness is synonymous with the idea of "God".

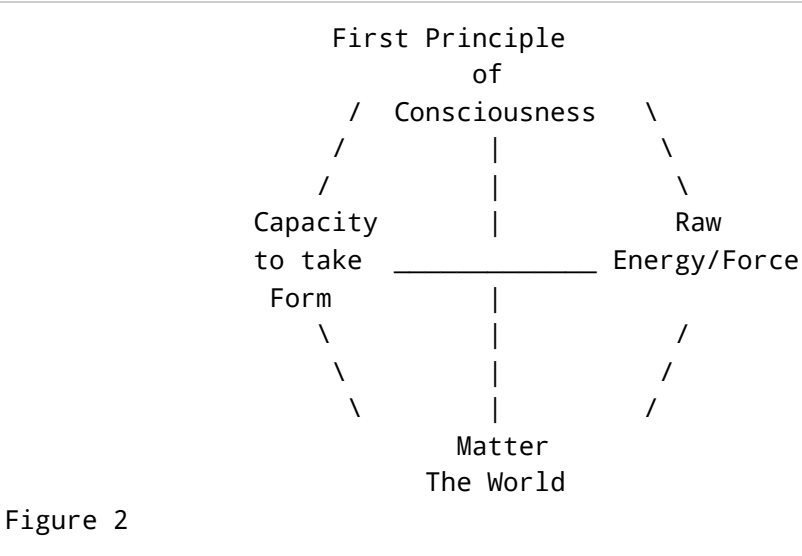

Figure 2

The glyph in Fig. 2 is the basis for the Tree of Life. The first principle of consciousness is called Kether, which means Crown. The raw energy of consciousness is called Chockhmah or Wisdom, and the capacity to give form to the energy of consciousness is called Binah, which is sometimes translated as Understanding, and sometimes as Intelligence. The outcome of the interaction of force and form, the physical world, called Malkuth or Kingdom. This quaternery is a Cabalistic representation of God-the- Knowable, in the sense that it the most primitive representation of God we are capable of comprehending; paradoxically, Kabbalah also contains a notion of God-the-Unknowable which transcends this glyph, and is called En Soph. There is not much I can say about En Soph, and what I can say I will postpone for later.

God-the-Knowable has four aspects, two male and two female: Kether and Chokhmah are both represented as male, and Binah and Malkuth are represented as female. One of the titles of Chokhmah is Abba, which means Father, and one of the titles of Binah is Aima, which means Mother, so you can think of Chokhmah as God- the-Father, and Binah

as God-the-Mother. Malkuth is the daughter, the female spirit of God-as-Matter, and it would not be wildly wrong to think of her as Mother Earth. One of the more pleasant things about Kabbalah is that its symbolism gives equal place to both male and female.

And what of God-the-Son? Is there also a God-the-Son in Kabbalah? There is, and this is the point where Kabbalah tackles the interesting problem of thee and me. The glyph in Fig. 2 is a model of consciousness, but not of self-consciousness, and self- consciousness throws an interesting spanner in the works.

The Fall

Self-consciousness is like a mirror in which consciousness sees itself reflected. Self-consciousness is modelled in Kabbalah by making a copy of figure 2.

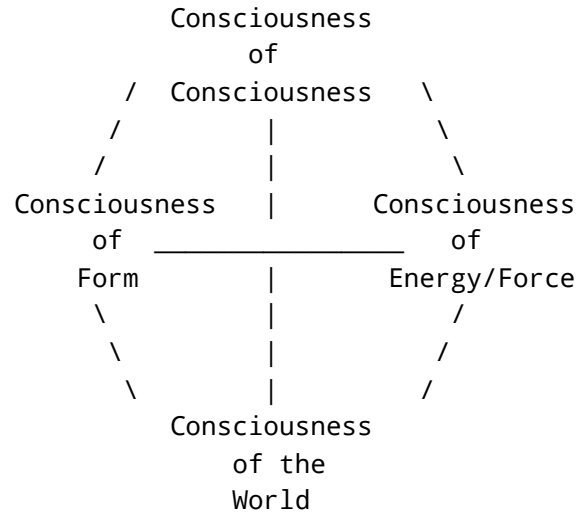

Figure 3

Figure 3. is Figure 2. reflected through self-consciousness. The overall effect of self-consciousness is to add an additional layer to Figure 2. as follows:

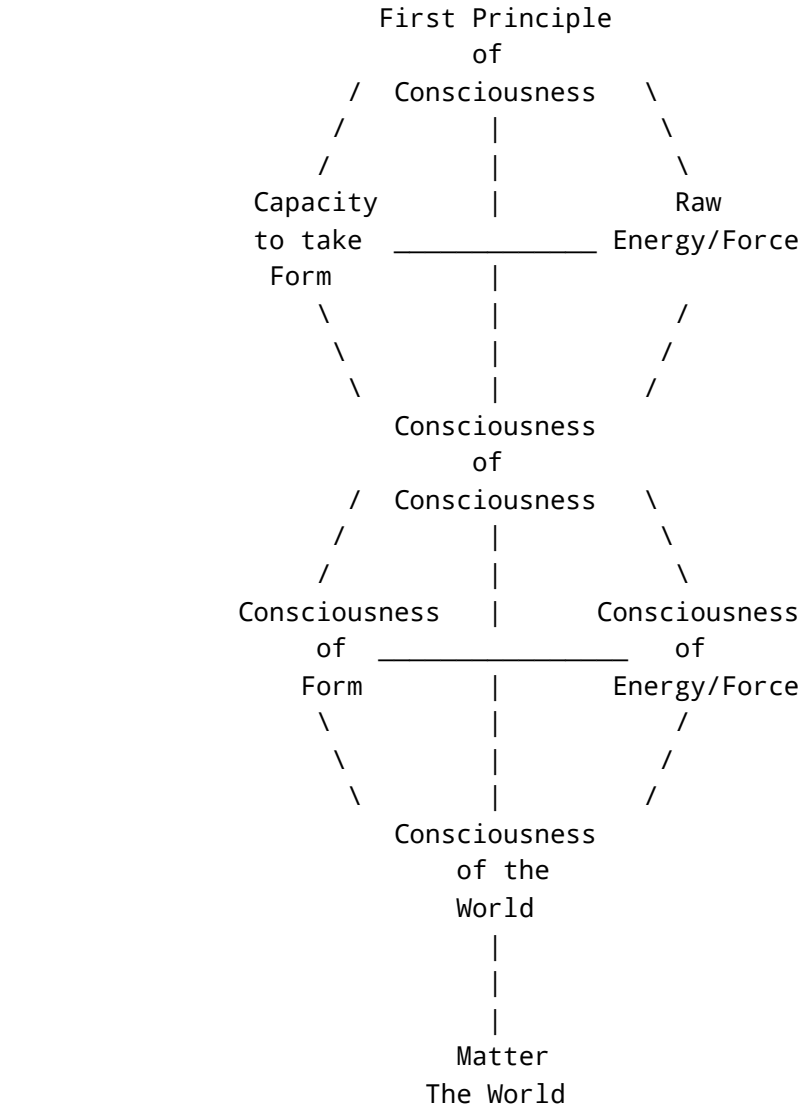

Figure 4

Fig. 2 is sometimes called "the Garden of Eden" because it represents a primal state of consciousness. The effect of self- consciousness as shown in Fig. 4 is to drive a wedge between the First Principle of Consciousness (Kether) and that Consciousness realized as matter and the physical world (Malkuth). This is called "the Fall", after the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. From a Cabalistic point of view the story of Eden, with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the serpent and the temptation, and the casting out from the Garden has a great deal of meaning in terms of understanding the evolution of consciousness.

Self-consciousness introduces four new states of consciousness: the Consciousness of Consciousness is called Tipheret, which means Beauty; the Consciousness of Force/Energy is called Netzach, which means Victory or Firmness; the Consciousness of Form is called Hod, which means Splendor or Glory, and the Consciousness of Matter is called Yesod, which means Foundation. These four states have readily observable manifestations, as shown below in Fig. 5:

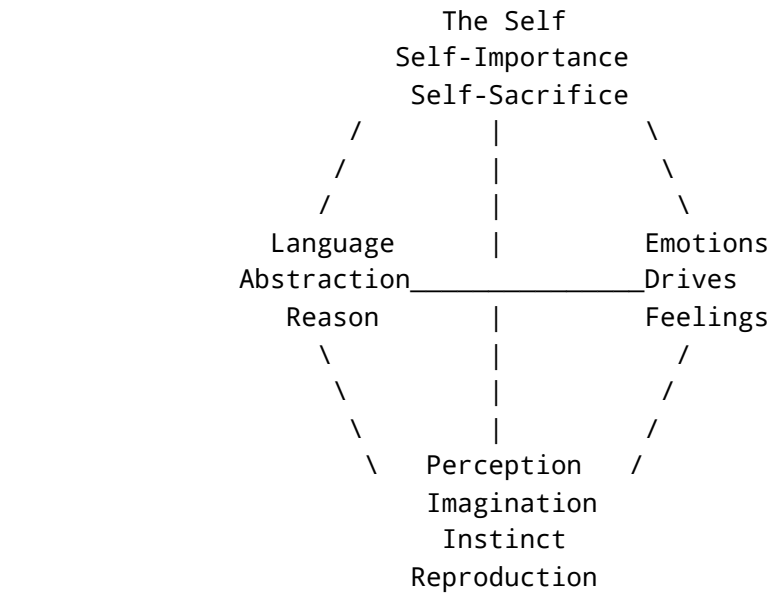

Figure 5

Figure 4. is almost the complete Tree of Life, but not quite - there are still two states missing. The inherent capacity of consciousness to take on structure and objectify itself (Binah, God-the-Mother) is reflected through self-consciousness as a perception of the limitedness and boundedness of things. We are conscious of space and time, yesterday and today, here and there, you and me, in and out, life and death, whole and broken, together and apart. We see things as limited and bounded and we have a perception of form as something "created" and "destroyed". My car was built a year ago, but it was smashed yesterday. I wrote an essay, but I lost it when my computer crashed. My granny is dead. The river changed its course. A law has been repealed. I broke my coffee mug. The world changes, and what was here yesterday is not here today. This perception acts like an "interface" between the quaternary of consciousness which represents "God", and the quaternary which represents a living self-conscious being, and two new states are introduced to represent this interface. The state which represents the creation of new forms is called Chesed, which means Mercy, and the state which represents the destruction of forms is called Gevurah, which means Strength. This is shown in Fig. 6. The objectification of forms which takes place in a self-conscious being, and the consequent tendency to view the world in terms of limitations and dualities (time and space, here and there, you and me, in and out, God and Man, good and evil) produces a barrier to perception which most people rarely overcome, and for this reason it has come to be called the Abyss. The Abyss is also marked on Figure 6.

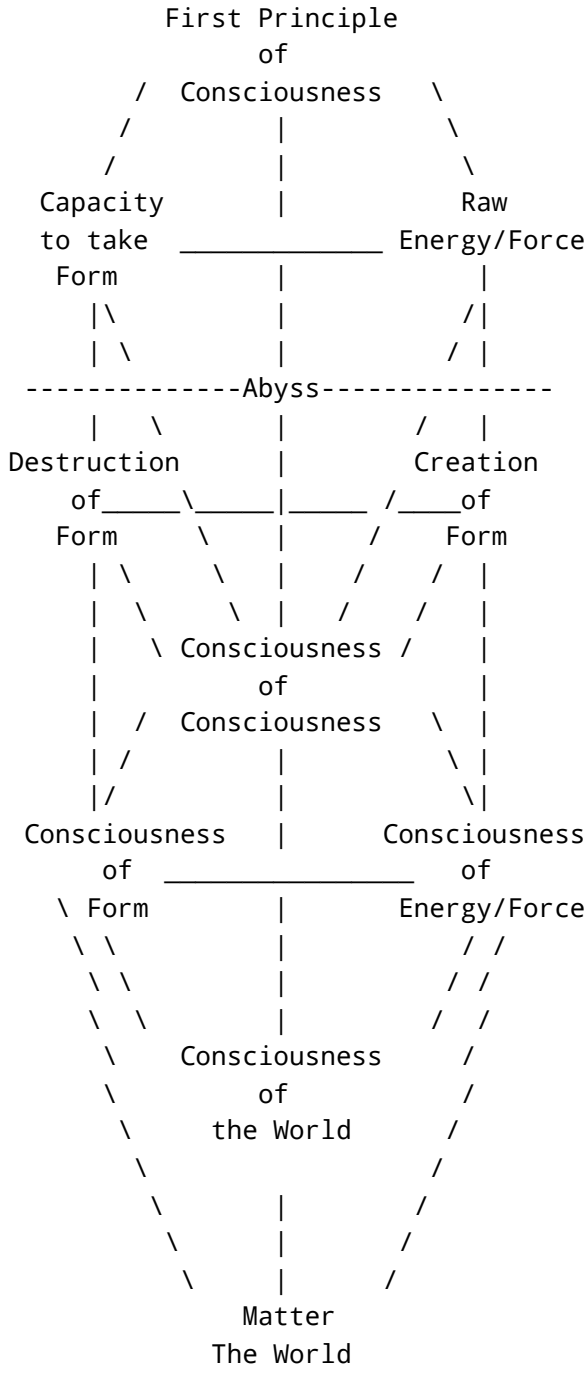

Figure 6

The diagram in Fig. 6 is called the Tree of Life. The "constructionist" approach I have used to justify its structure is a little unusual, but the essence of my presentation can be found in the "Zohar" under the guise of the Macroprosopus and Microprosopus, although in this form it is not readily accessible to the average reader. My attempt to show how the Tree of Life can be derived out of pure consciousness through the interaction of an abstract notion of force and form was not intended to be a convincing exercise from an intellectual point of view - the Tree of Life is primarily a gnostic rather than a rational or intellectual explanation of consciousness and its interaction with the physical world.

The Tree is composed of 10 states or sephiroth (sephiroth plural, sephira singular) and 22 interconnecting paths. The age of this diagram is unknown: there is enough information in the 13th. century "Sepher ha Zohar" to construct this diagram, and the doctrine of the sephiroth has been attributed to Isaac the Blind in the 12th. century, but we have no certain knowledge of its origin. It probably originated sometime in the interval between the 6th. and 13th.

centuries AD. The origin of the word "sephira" is unclear - it is almost certainly derived from the Hebrew word for "number" (SPhR), but it has also been attributed to the Greek word for "sphere" and even to the Hebrew word for a sapphire (SPhIR). With a characteristic aptitude for discovering hidden meanings everywhere, Kabbalists find all three derivations useful, so take your pick.

In the language of earlier Cabalistic writers the sephiroth represented ten primeval emanations of God, ten foci through which the energy of a hidden, absolute and unknown Godhead (En Soph) propagated throughout the creation, like white light passing through a prism. The sephiroth can be interpreted as aspects of God, as states of consciousness, or as nodes akin to the Chakras in the occult anatomy of a human being.

I have left out one important detail from the structure of the Tree. There is an eleventh "something" which is definitely *not* a sephira, but is often shown on modern representations of the Tree. The Cabalistic "explanation" runs as follows: when Malkuth "fell" out of the Garden of Eden (Fig. 2) it left behind a "hole" in the fabric of the Tree, and this "hole", located in the center of the Abyss, is called Daath, or Knowledge. Daath is *not* a sephira; it is a hole. This may sound like gobbledy-gook, and in the sense that it is only a metaphor, it is.

The completed Tree of Life with the Hebrew titles of the sephiroth is shown below in Fig. 7.

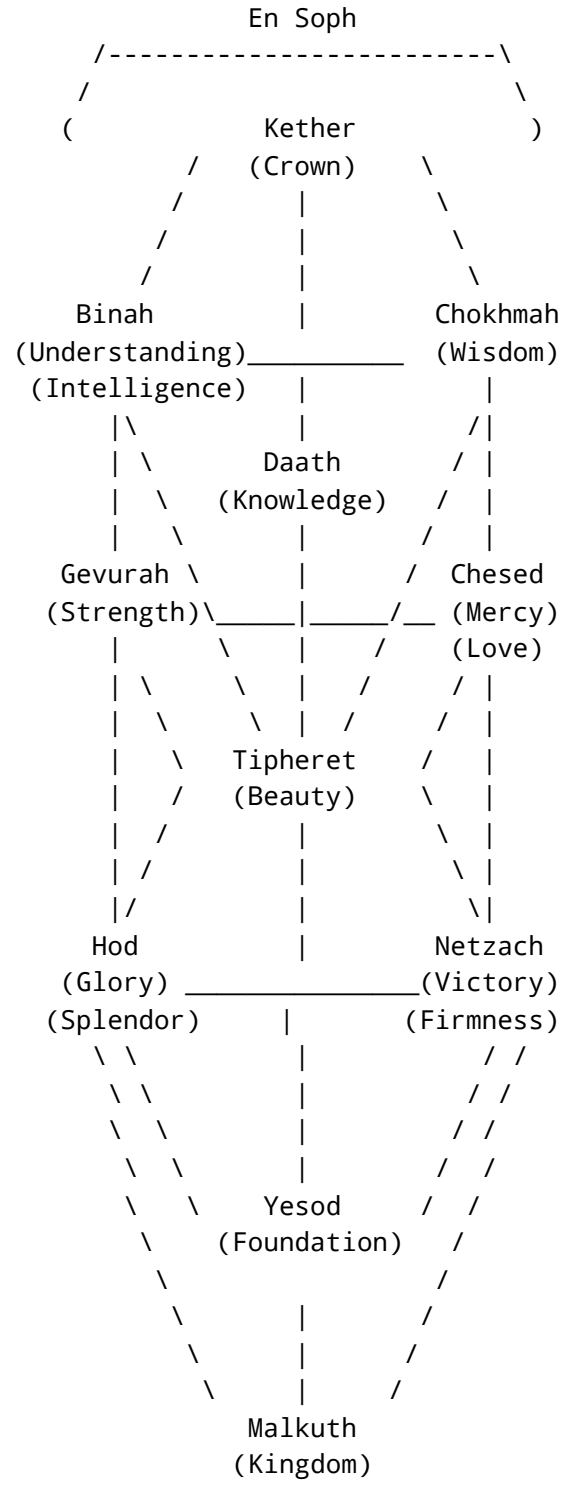

Figure 7

From an historical point of view the doctrine of emanations and the Tree of Life are only one small part of a huge body of Cabalistic speculation about the nature of divinity and our part in creation, but it is the part which has survived. The Tree continues to be used in the Twentieth Century because it has proved to be a useful and productive symbol for practices of a magical, mystical and religious nature. Modern Kabbalah in the Western Mystery Tradition is largely concerned with the understanding and practical application of the Tree of Life, and the following set of notes will list some of the characteristics of each sephira in more detail so that you will have a "snapshot" of what each sephira represents before going on to examine the sephiroth and the "deep structure" of the Tree in more detail.

Chapter 2.: Sephirothic Correspondences

The correspondences are a set of symbols, associations and qualities which provide a handle on the elusive something a sephira represents. Some of the correspondences are hundreds of years old, many were concocted this century, and some are my own; some fit very well, and some are obscure - oddly enough it is often the most obscure and ill-fitting correspondence which is most productive; like a Zen riddle it perplexes and annoys the mind until it arrives at the right place more in spite of the correspondence than because of it.

There are few canonical correspondences; some of the sephiroth have alternative names, some of the names have alternative translations, the mapping from Hebrew spellings to the English alphabet varies from one author to the next, and inaccuracies and accretions are handed down like the family silver. I keep my Hebrew dictionary to hand but guarantee none of the English spellings.

The correspondences I have given are as follows:

1. The Meaning is a translation of the Hebrew name of the sephira.
2. The Planet in most cases is the planet associated with the sephira. In some cases it is not a planet at all (e.g. the fixed stars). The planets are ordered by decreasing apparent motion - this is one correspondence which appears to pre-date Copernicus!
3. The Element is the physical element (earth, water, air, fire, aethyr) which has most in common with the nature of the Sephira. The Golden Dawn applied an excess of logic to these attributions and made a mess of them, to the confusion of many. Only the five Lower Face sephiroth have been attributed an element.
4. Briatic color. This is the color of the sephira as seen in the world of Creation, Briah. There are color scales for the other three worlds but I haven't found them to be useful in practical work.
5. Magical Image. Useful in meditations; some are astute.
6. The Briatic Correspondence is an abstract quality which says something about the essence of the way the sephira expresses itself.
7. The Illusion characterizes the way in which the energy of the sephira clouds one's judgement; it is something which is *obviously* true. Most people suffer from one or more of these according to their temperament.
8. The Obligation is a personal quality which is demanded of an initiate at this level.
9. The Virtue and Vice are the energy of the sephiroth as it manifests in a positive and negative sense in the personality.
10. Klippoth is a word which means "shell". In medieval Kabbalah each sephira was "seen" to be adding form to the sephira which preceded it in the Lightning Flash (see Chapter 3.). Form was seen to an accretion, a shell around the pure divine energy of the Godhead, and each layer or shell hid the divine radiance a little bit more, until God was buried in form and exiled in matter, the end-point of the process. At the time attitudes to matter were tainted with the Manichean notion that matter was evil, a snare for the spirit, and consequently the Klippoth or shells were "demonised" and actually turned into demons. The correspondence I have given here restores the original notion of a shell of form *without* the corresponding force to activate it; it is the lifeless, empty husk of a sephira devoid of force, and while it isn't a literal demon, it is hardly a bundle of laughs when you come across it.
11. The Command refers to the Four Powers of the Sphinx, with an extra one added for good measure.
12. The Spiritual Experience is just that.
13. The Titles are a collection of alternative names for the sephira; most are very old.
14. The God Name is a key to invoking the power of the sephira in the world of emanation, Atziluth.
15. The Archangel mediates the energy of the sephira in the world of creation, Briah.
16. The Angel Order administers the energy of the sephira in the world of formation, Yetzirah.
17. The Keywords are a collection of phrases which summarize key aspects of the sephira.

Sephira:	Malkuth

Meaning:	Kingdom
Planet:	Cholem Yesodeth (the Breaker of the Foundations, sphere of the elements, the Earth)
Element:	earth
Briatic Color:	brown (citrine, russet-red, olive green, black)
Number:	10
Magical Image:	a young woman crowned and throned
Briatic Correspondence:	stability
Illusion:	materialism
Obligation:	discipline
Virtue:	discrimination
Vice:	avarice & inertia
Klippoth:	stasis
Command:	keep silent
Spiritual Experience:	Vision of the Holy Guardian Angel
Titles:	The Gate; Gate of Death; Gate of Tears; Gate of Justice; The Inferior Mother; Malkah, the Queen; Kallah, the Bride; the Virgin.
God Name:	Adonai ha Aretz, Adonai Malekh
Archangel:	Sandalphon
Angel Order:	Ishim
Keywords:	the real world, physical matter, the Earth, Mother Earth, the physical elements, the natural world, sticks & stones, possessions, faeces, practicality, solidity, stability, inertia, heaviness, bodily death, incarnation.

Sephira:	Yesod
Meaning:	Foundation
Planet:	Levanah (the Moon)
Element:	Aethyr
Briatic Color:	purple
Number:	9
Magical Image:	a beautiful man, very strong (e.g. Atlas)
Briatic Correspondence:	receptivity, perception
Illusion:	security
Obligation:	trust
Virtue:	independence
Vice:	idleness
Klippoth:	zombieism, robotism
Command:	go!
Spiritual Experience:	Vision of the Machinery of the Universe
Titles:	The Treasure House of Images
God Name:	Shaddai el Chai
Archangel:	Gabriel
Angel Order:	Cherubim

Keywords:	perception, interface, imagination, image, appearance, glamour, the Moon, the unconscious, instinct, tides, illusion, hidden infrastructure, dreams, divination, anything as it seems to be and not as it is, mirrors and crystals, the "Astral Plane", Aethyr, glue, tunnels, sex & reproduction, the genitals, cosmetics, instinctive magic (psychism), secret doors, shamanic tunnel.

Sephira:	Hod
Meaning:	Glory, Splendor
Planet:	Kokab (Mercury)
Element:	air
Briatic Color:	orange
Number:	8
Magical Image:	an hermaphrodite
Briatic Correspondence:	abstraction
Illusion:	order
Obligation:	learn
Virtue:	honesty, truthfulness
Vice:	dishonesty
Klippoth:	rigidity
Command:	will
Spiritual Experience:	Vision of Splendor
Titles:	-
God Name:	Elohim Tzabaoth
Archangel:	Raphael
Angel Order:	Beni Elohim
Keywords:	reason, abstraction, communication, conceptualization, logic, the sciences, language, speech, money (as a concept), mathematics, medicine & healing, trickery, writing, media (as communication), pedantry, philosophy, Kabbalah (as an abstract system), protocol, the Law, ownership, territory, theft, "Rights", ritual magic.

Sephira:	Netzach
Meaning:	Victory, Firmness
Planet:	Nogah (Venus)
Element:	water
Briatic Color:	green
Number:	7
Magical Image:	a beautiful naked woman
Briatic Correspondence:	nurture
Illusion:	projection
Obligation:	responsibility
Virtue:	unselfishness
Vice:	selfishness

Klippoth:	habit, routine
Command:	know
Spiritual Experience:	Vision of Beauty Triumphant
Titles:	-
God Name:	Jehovah Tzabaoth
Archangel:	Haniel
Angel Order:	Elohim
Keywords:	passion, pleasure, luxury, sensual beauty, feelings, drives, emotions - love, hate, anger, joy, depression, misery, excitement, desire, lust; nurture, libido, empathy, sympathy, ecstatic magic.

Sephira:	Tipheret
Meaning:	Beauty
Planet:	Shemesh (the Sun)
Element:	fire
Briatic Color:	yellow
Number:	6
Magical Image:	a king, a child, a sacrificed god
Briatic Correspondence:	centrality, wholeness
Illusion:	identification
Obligation:	integrity
Virtue:	devotion to the Great Work
Vice:	pride, self-importance
Klippoth:	hollowness
Command:	dare
Spiritual Experience:	Vision of Harmony
Titles:	Melekh, the King; Zoar Anpin, the lesser countenance, the Microprosopus; the Son; Rachamin, charity.
God Name:	Aloah va Daath
Archangel:	Michael
Angel Order:	Malachim
Keywords:	harmony, integrity, balance, wholeness, the Self, self-importance, self-sacrifice, the Son of God, centrality, the Philospher's Stone, identity, the solar plexus, a King, the Great Work.

Sephira:	Gevurah
Meaning:	Strength
Planet:	Madim (Mars)
Briatic Color:	red
Number:	5
Magical Image:	a mighty warrior
Briatic Correspondence:	power
Illusion:	invincibility
Obligation:	courage & loyalty

Virtue:	courage & energy
Vice:	cruelty
Klippoth:	bureaucracy
Spiritual Experience:	Vision of Power
Titles:	Pachad, fear; Din, justice.
God Name:	Elohim Gevor
Archangel:	Kamael
Angel Order:	Seraphim
Keywords:	power, justice, retribution (eaten cold), the Law (in execution), cruelty, oppression, domination & the Power Myth, severity, necessary destruction, catabolism, martial arts.

Sephira:	Chesed
Meaning:	Mercy
Planet:	Tzadekh (Jupiter)
Briatic Color:	blue
Number:	4
Magical Image:	a mighty king
Briatic Correspondence:	authority
Illusion:	being right (self-righteousness)
Obligation:	humility
Virtue:	humility & obedience
Vice:	tyranny, hypocrisy, bigotry, gluttony
Klippoth:	ideology
Spiritual Experience:	Vision of Love
Titles:	Gedulah, magnificence, love, majesty
God Name:	El
Archangel:	Tzadkiel
Angel Order:	Chasmalim
Keywords:	authority, creativity, inspiration, vision, leadership, excess, waste, secular and spiritual power, submission and the Annihilation Myth, the atom bomb, obliteration, birth, service.

Non-Sephira:	Daath
Meaning:	Knowledge

Daath has no manifest qualities and cannot be invoked directly.

Keywords:	hole, tunnel, gateway, doorway, black hole, vortex.

Sephira:	Binah
Meaning:	Understanding,
Planet:	Shabbathai (Saturn)
Briatic Color:	black
Number:	3

Magical Image:	an old woman on a throne
Briatic Correspondence:	comprehension
Illusion:	death
Virtue:	silence
Vice:	inertia
Klippoth:	fatalism
Spiritual Experience:	Vision of Sorrow
Titles:	Aima, the Mother; Ama, the Crone; Marah, the bitter sea; Khorsia, the Throne; the Fifty Gates of Understanding; Intelligence; the Mother of Form; the Superior Mother.
God Name:	Elohim
Archangel:	Cassiel
Angel Order:	Aralim
Keywords:	limitation, form, constraint, heaviness, slowness, old-age, infertility, incarnation, karma, fate, time, space, natural law, the womb and gestation, darkness, boundedness, enclosure, containment, fertility, mother, weaving and spinning, death (annihilation).

Sephira:	Chokhmah
Meaning:	Wisdom
Planet:	Mazlot (the Zodiac, the fixed stars)
Briatic Color:	silver/white, grey
Number:	2
Magical Image:	a bearded man
Briatic Correspondence:	revolution
Illusion:	independence
Virtue:	good
Vice:	evil
Klippoth:	arbitrariness
Spiritual Experience:	Vision of God face-to-face
Titles:	Abba, the Father. The Supernal Father.
God Name:	Jah
Archangel:	Ratziel
Angel Order:	Auphanim
Keywords:	pure creative energy, lifeforce, the wellspring.

Sephira:	Kether
Meaning:	Crown
Planet:	Rashith ha Gilgalim (first swirlings, the Big Bang)
Briatic Color:	pure white
Number:	1
Magical Image:	a bearded man seen in profile
Briatic Correspondence:	unity
Illusion:	attainment
Virtue:	attainment

Vice:	---
Klippoth:	futility
Spiritual Experience:	Union with God
Titles:	Ancient of Days, the Greater Countenance (Macroprosopus), the White Head, Concealed of the Concealed, Existence of Existences, the Smooth Point, Rum Maalah, the Highest Point.
God Name:	Eheieh
Archangel:	Metatron
Angel Order:	Chaioth ha Qadesh
Keywords:	unity, union, all, pure consciousness, God, the Godhead, manifestation, beginning, source, emanation.

Chapter 3: The Pillars & the Lightning Flash

In Chapter 1. the Tree of Life was derived from three concepts, or rather one primary concept and two derivative concepts which are "contained" within it. The primary concept was called consciousness, and it was said to "contain" within it the two complementary concepts of force and form. This chapter builds on the idea by introducing the three Pillars of the Tree, and uses the Pillars to clarify a process called the Lightning Flash.

The Three Pillars are shown in Figure 8. below.

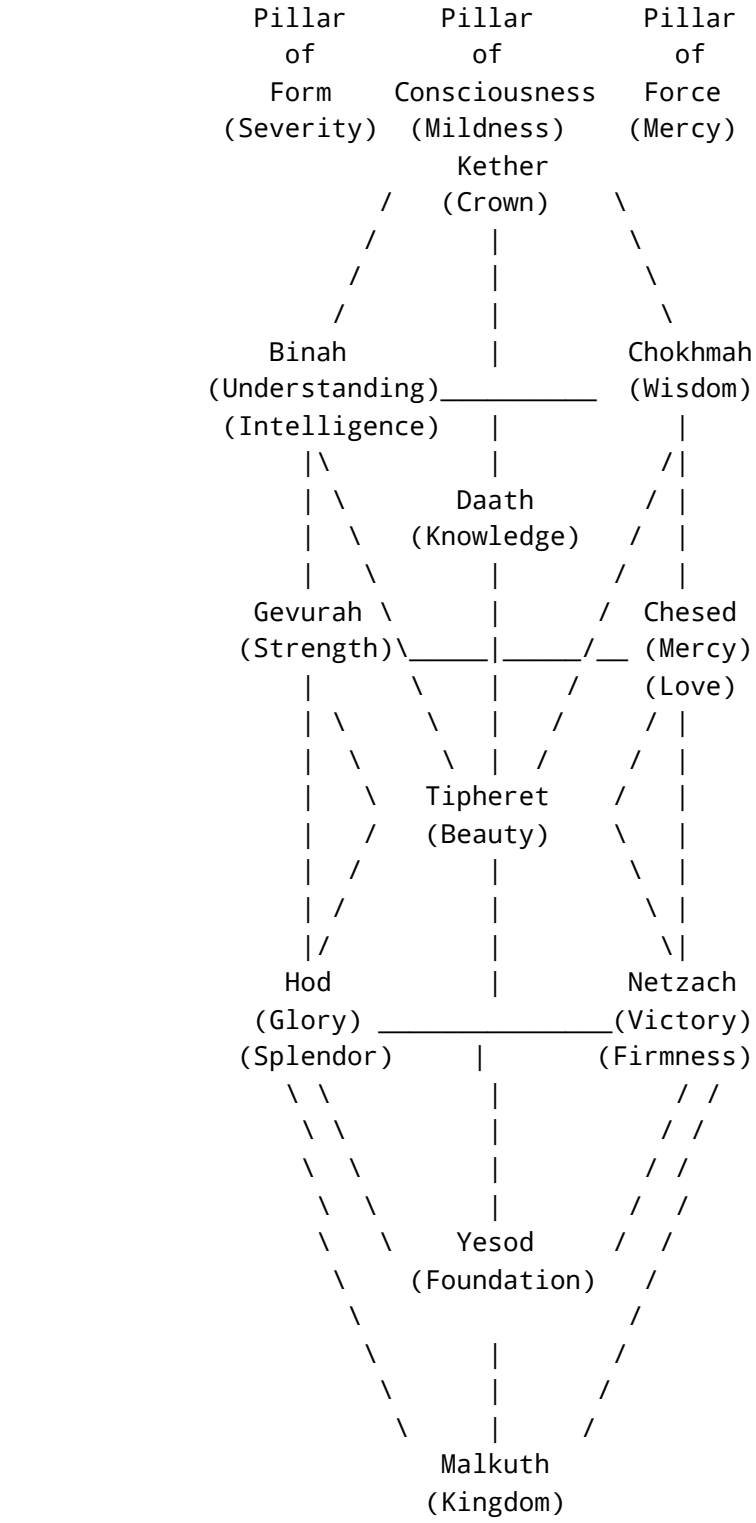

Figure 8

Not surprisingly the three pillars are referred to as the pillars of consciousness, force and form. The pillar of consciousness contains the sephiroth Kether, Tiphereth, Yesod and Malkuth; the pillar of force contains the sephiroth Chokhmah, Chesed and Netzach; the pillar of form contains the sephiroth Binah, Gevurah and Hod. In older Cabalistic texts the pillars are referred to as the pillars of mildness, mercy and severity, and it is not immediately obvious how the older jargon relates to the new. To the medieval Kabbalist (and this is a recurring metaphor in the Zohar) the creation as an emanation of God is a delicate *balance* (metheqela) between two

opposing tendencies: the mercy of God, the outflowing, creative, life-giving and sustaining tendency in God, and the severity or strict judgement of God, the limiting, defining, life-taking and ultimately wrathful or destructive tendency in God. The creation is "energized" by these two tendencies as if stretched between the poles of a battery.

Modern Kabbalah makes a half-hearted attempt to remove the more obvious anthropomorphisms in the descriptions of "God"; mercy and severity are misleading terms, apt to remind one of a man with a white beard, and even in medieval times the terms had distinctly technical meanings as the following quotation shows [1]:

> "It must be remembered that to the Kabbalist, judgement [Din - judgement, another title of Gevurah] means the imposition of limits and the correct determination of things. According to Cordovero the quality of judgement is inherent in everything insofar as everything wishes to remain what it is, to stay within its boundaries."

I understand the word "form" in precisely this sense - it is that which defines *what* a thing is, the structure whereby a given thing is distinct from every other thing.

As for "consciousness", I use the word "consciousness" in a sense so abstract that it is virtually meaningless, and according to whim I use the word God instead, where it is understood that both words are placeholders for something which is potentially knowable in the gnostic sense only - consciousness can be *defined* according to the *forms* it takes, in which case we are defining the forms, *not* the consciousness. The same qualification applies to the word "force". My inability to define two of the three concepts which underpin the structure of the Tree is a nuisance which is tackled traditionally by the use of extravagant metaphors, and by elimination ("not this, not that").

The classification of sephiroth into three pillars is a way of saying that each sephira in a pillar partakes of a common quality which is "inherited" in a progressively more developed and structured form from of the top of a pillar to the bottom. Tipheret, Yesod and Malkuth all share with Kether the quality of "consciousness in balance" or "synthesis of opposing qualities", or but in each case it is expressed differently according to the increased degree of structure imposed. Likewise, Chokhmah, Chesed and Netzach share the quality of force or energy or expansiveness, and Binah, Gevurah and Hod share the quality of form, definition and limitation. From Kether down to Malkuth, force and form are combined; the symbolism of the Tree has something in common with a production line, with molten metal coming in one end and finished cars coming out the other, and with that metaphor we are now ready to describe the Lightning Flash, the process whereby God takes on flesh, the process which created and sustains the creation.

In the beginning was Something. Or Nothing. It doesn't really matter which term we use, as both are equally meaningless in this context. Nothing is probably the better of the two terms, because I can use Something in the next paragraph. Kabbalists call this Nothing "En Soph" which literally means "no end" or infinity, and understand by this a hidden, unmanifest God-in- Itself.

Out of this incomprehensible and indescribable Nothing came Something. Probably more words have been devoted to this moment than any other in Kabbalah, and it is all too easy to make fun the effort which has gone into elaborating the indescribable, so I won't, but in return do not expect me to provide a justification for why Something came out of Nothing. It just did. A point crystallized in the En Soph. In some versions of the story the En Soph "contracted" to "make room" for the creation (Isaac Luria's theory of Tsimtsum), and this is probably an important clarification for those who have rubbed noses with the hidden face of God, but for the purposes of these notes it is enough that a point crystallized. This point was the crown of creation, the sephira Kether, and within Kether was contained all the unrealized potential of the creation.

An aspect of Kether is the raw creative force of God which blasts into the creation like the blast of hot gas which keeps a hot air balloon in the air. Kabbalists are quite clear about this; the creation didn't just happen a long time ago - it is happening all the time, and without the force to sustain it the creation would crumple like a balloon. The force-like aspect within Kether is the sephira Chokhmah and it can be thought of as the will of God, because without it the creation would cease to *be*. The whole of creation is maintained by this ravening, primeval desire to *be*, to become, to exist, to change, to evolve. The experiential distinction between Kether, the point of emanation, and Chokhmah, the creative outpouring, is elusive, but some of the difference is captured in the phrases "I am" and "I become".

Force by itself achieves nothing; it needs to be contained, and the balloon analogy is appropriate again. Chokhmah contains within it the necessity of Binah, the Mother of Form. The person who taught me Kabbalah (a woman) told me Chokhmah (Abba, the Father) was God's prick, and Binah (Aima, the mother) was God's womb, and left me with the picture of one half of God continuously ejaculating into the other half. The author of the Zohar also makes frequent use of sexual polarity as a metaphor to describe the relationship between force and form, or mercy and severity (although the most vivid sexual metaphors are used for the marriage of the Microprosopus and his bride, the Queen and Inferior Mother, the sephira Malkuth).

The sephira Binah is the Mother of Form; form exists within Binah as a potentiality, not as an actuality, just as a womb contains the potential of a baby. Without the possibility of form, no thing would be distinct from any other thing; it would be impossible to distinguish between things, impossible to have individuality or identity or change. The Mother of Form contains the potential of form within her womb and gives birth to form when a creative impulse crosses the Abyss to the Pillar of Force and emanates through the sephira Chesed. Again we have the idea of "becoming", of outflowing creative energy, but at a lower level. The sephira Chesed is the point at which form becomes perceptible to the mind as an inspiration, an idea, a vision, that "Eureka!" moment immediately prior to rushing around shouting "I've got it! I've got it!" Chesed is that quality of genuine inspiration, a sense of being "plugged in" which characterizes the visionary leaders who drive the human race onwards into every new kind of endeavour. It can be for good or evil; a leader who can tap the petty malice and vindictiveness in any person and channel it into a vision of a new order and genocide is just as much a visionary as any other, but the positive side of Chesed is the humanitarian leader who brings about genuine improvements to our common life.

No change comes easy; as Cordova points out "everything wishes to remain what it is". The creation of form is balanced in the sephira Gevurah by the preservation and destruction of form. Any impulse of change is channelled through Gevurah, and if it is not resisted then something will be destroyed. If you want to make paper you cut down a tree. If you want to abolish slavery you have to destroy the culture which perpetuates it. If you want to change someone's mind you have to destroy that person's beliefs about the matter in question. The sephira Gevurah is the quality of strict judgement which opposes change, destroys the unfamiliar, and corresponds in many ways to an immune system within the body of God.

There has to be a balance between creation and destruction. Too much change, too many ideas, too many things happening too quickly can have the quality of chaos (and can literally become that), whereas too little change, no new ideas, too much form and structure and protocol can suffocate and stifle. There has to be a balance which "makes sense" and this "idea of balance" or "making sense" is expressed in the sephira Tiphereth. It is an instinctive morality, and it isn't present by default in the human species. It isn't based on cultural norms; it doesn't have its roots in upbringing (although it is easily destroyed by it). Some people have it in a large measure, and some people are (to all intents and purposes) completely lacking in it. It doesn't necessarily respect conventional morality: it may laugh in its face. I can't say what it is in any detail, because it is peculiar and individual, but those who have it have a natural quality of integrity, soundness of judgement, an instinctive sense of rightness, justice and compassion, and a willingness to fight or suffer in defense of that sense of justice. Tiphereth is a paradoxical sephira because in many people it is simply not there. It can be developed, and that is one of the goals of initiation, but for many people Tiphereth is a room with nothing in it.

Having passed through Gevurah on the Pillar of Form, and found its way through the moral filter of Tiphereth, a creative impulse picks up energy once more on the Pillar of Force via the Sephira Netzach, where the energy of "becoming" finds its final expression in the form of "vital urges". Why do we carry on living? Why bother? What is it that compels us to do things? An artist may have a vision of a piece of art, but what actually compels the artist to paint or sculpt or write? Why do we want to compete and win? Why do we care what happens to others? The sephira Netzach expresses the basic vital creative urges in a form we can recognize as drives, feelings and emotions. Netzach is pre-verbal; ask a child why he wants a toy and the answer will be "I just do". "But why," you ask, wondering why he doesn't want the much more "sensible" toy you had in mind. "Why don't you want this one here."

> "I just don't. I want this one."
> "But what's so good about that one."
> "I don't know what to say I just like it."

This conversation is not fictitious and is quintessentially Netzach. The structure of the Tree of Life posits that the basic driving forces which characterize our behavior are pre-verbal and non-rational; anyone who has tried to change another person's basic nature or beliefs through force of rational argument will know this.

After Netzach we go to the sephira Hod to pick up our last cargo of Form. Ask a child why they want something and they say "I just do". Press an adult and you will get an earful of "reasons". We live in a culture where it is important (often essential) to give reasons for the things we do, and Hod is the sephira of form where it is possible to give shape to our wants in terms of reasons and explanations. Hod is the sephira of abstraction, reason, logic, language and communication, and a reflection of the Mother of Form in the human mind. We have a innate capacity to abstract, to go immediately from the particular to the general, and we have an innate capacity to communicate these abstractions using language, and it should be clear why the alternative translation of Binah is "intelligence"; Binah is the "intelligence of God", and Hod underpins what we generally recognize as intelligence in people - the ability to grasp complex abstractions, reason about them, and articulate this understanding using some means of communication.

The synthesis of Hod and Netzach on the Pillar of Consciousness is the sephira Yesod. Yesod is the sephira of interface, and the comparison with computer peripheral interfaces is an excellent one. Yesod is sometimes called "the Receptacle of the Emanations", and it interfaces the emanations of all three pillars to the sephira Malkuth, and it is through Yesod that the final abstract form of something is realized in matter. Form in Yesod is no longer abstract; it is explicit, but not yet individual - that last quality is reserved for Malkuth alone. Yesod is like the mold in a bottle factory - the mold is a realization of the abstract idea "bottle" in so far as it expresses the shape of a particular bottle design in every detail, but it is not itself an individual bottle.

The final step in the process is the sephira Malkuth, where God becomes flesh, and every abstract form is realized in actuality, in the "real world". There is much to say about this, but I will keep it for later.

The process I have described is called the Lightning Flash. The Lightning Flash runs as follows: Kether, Chokhmah, Binah, Chesed, Gevurah, Tiphereth, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, Malkuth, and if you trace the Lightning Flash on a diagram of the Tree you will see that it has the zig-zag shape of a lightning flash. The sephiroth are numbered according to their order on the lightning flash: Kether is 1, Chokhmah is 2, and so on. The "Sepher Yetzirah" [2] has this to say about the sephiroth:

> "When you think of the ten sephiroth cover your heart and seal the desire of your lips to announce their divinity. Yoke your mind. Should it escape your grasp, reach out and bring it back under your control. As it was said, 'And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning,' in such a manner was the Covenant created."

The quotation within the quotation comes from Ezekiel 1.14, a text which inspired a large amount of early Cabalistic speculation, and it is probable that the Lightning Flash as described is one of the earliest components of the idea of sephirothic emanation.

The Lightning Flash describes the creative process, beginning with the unknown, unmanifest hidden God, and follows it through ten distinct stages to a change in the material world. It can be used to describe *any* change - lighting a match, picking your nose, walking the dog - and novices are usually set the exercise of analyzing any arbitrarily chosen event in terms of the Lightning Flash. Because the Lightning Flash can be used to understand the inner process whereby the material world of the senses changes and evolves, it is a key to practical magical work, and because it is intended to account for *all* change it follows that all change is equally magical, and the word "magic" is essentially meaningless (but nevertheless useful for distinguishing between "normal" and "abnormal" states of consciousness, and the modes of causality which pertain to each).

It also follows that the key to understanding our "spiritual nature" does not belong in the spiritual empyrean, where it remains inaccessible, but in *all* the routine and unexciting little things in life. Everything is equally "spiritual", equally "divine", and there is more to be learned from picking one's nose than there is in a spiritual discipline which puts you "here" and God "over there". The Lightning Flash ends in Malkuth, and it can be followed like a thread through the hidden pathways of creation until one arrives back at the source. The next chapter will retrace the Lightning Flash by examining the qualities of each sephira in more detail.

1. Scholem, Gershom G. "Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism", Schoken Books 1974
2. Westcott, W. Wynn, ed. "Sepher Yetzirah". Many reprintings.

Chapter 4: The Sephiroth

This chapter provides a detailed look at each of the ten sephiroth and draws together material scattered over previous chapters.

Malkuth

Malkuth is the Cinderella of the sephiroth. It is the sephira most often ignored by beginners, the sephira most often glossed over in Cabalistic texts, and it is not only the most immediate of the sephira but it is also the most complex, and for sheer inscrutability it rivals Kether - indeed, there is a Cabalistic aphorism that "Kether is in Malkuth, and Malkuth is in Kether, but after another manner".

The word Malkuth means "Kingdom", and the sephira is the culmination of a process of emanation whereby the creative power of the Godhead is progressively structured and defined as it moves down the Tree and arrives in a completed form in Malkuth. Malkuth is the sphere of matter, substance, the real, physical world. In the least compromising versions of materialist philosophy (e.g. Hobbes) there is nothing beyond physical matter, and from that viewpoint the Tree of Life beyond Malkuth does not exist: our feelings of identity and self-consciousness are nothing more than a by-product of chemical reactions in the brain, and the mind is a complex automata which suffers from the disease of metaphysical delusions. Kabbalah is *not* a materialist model of reality, but when we examine Malkuth by itself we find ourselves immersed in matter, and it is natural to think in terms of physics, chemistry and molecular biology. The natural sciences provide the most accurate models of matter and the physical

world that we have, and it would be foolishness of the first order to imagine that Kabbalah can provide better explanations of the nature of matter on the basis of a study of the text of the Old Testament. Not that I under-rate the intuition which has gone into the making of Kabbalah over the centuries, but for practical purposes the average university science graduate knows (much) more about the material stuff of the world than medieval Kabbalists, and a grounding in modern physics is as good a way to approach Malkuth as any other.

For those who are not comfortable with physics there are alternative, more traditional ways of approaching Malkuth. The magical image of Malkuth is that of a young woman crowned and throned. The woman is Malkah, the Queen, Kallah, the Bride. She is the inferior mother, a reflection and realization of the superior mother Binah. She is the Queen who inhabits the Kingdom, and the Bride of the Microprosopus. She is Gaia, Mother Earth, but of course she is not only the substance of this world; she is the body of the entire physical universe.

Some care is required when assigning Mother/Earth goddesses to Malkuth, because some of them correspond more closely to the superior mother Binah. There is a close and deep connection between Malkuth and Binah which results in the two sephiroth sharing similar correspondences, and one of the oldest Cabalistic texts [1] has this to say about Malkuth:

> "The title of the tenth path [Malkuth] is the Resplendent Intelligence. It is called this because it is exalted above every head from where it sits upon the throne of Binah. It illuminates the numinosity of all lights and causes to emanate the Power of the archetype of countenances or forms."

One of the titles of Binah is Khorsia, or Throne, and the image which this text provides is that Binah provides the framework upon which Malkuth sits. We will return to this later. Binah contains the potential of form in the abstract, while Malkuth is is the fullest realization of form, and both sephiroth share the correspondences of heaviness, limitation, finiteness, inertia, avarice, silence, and death.

The female quality of Malkuth is often identified with the Shekhinah, the female spirit of God in the creation, and Cabalistic literature makes much of the (carnal) relationship of God and the Shekhinah. Waite [7] mentions that the relationship between God and Shekhinah is mirrored in the relationship between man and woman, and provides a great deal of information on both the Shekhinah and what he quaintly calls "The Mystery of Sex". After the exile of the Jews from Spain in 1492, Kabbalists identified their own plight with the fate of the Shekhinah, and she is pictured as being cast out into matter in much the same way as the Gnostics pictured Sophia, the outcast divine wisdom. The doctrine of the Shekhinah within Kabbalah and within Judaism as a whole is complex and it is something I don't feel competent to comment further on; more information can be found in [3] & [7].

Malkuth is the sphere of the physical elements and Kabbalists still use the four-fold scheme which dates back at least as far as Empedocles and probably the Ark. The four elements correspond to four readily-observable states of matter:

solid	earth
liquid	water
gas	air
plasma	fire/electric arc (lightning)

In addition it is not uncommon to include a fifth element so rarified and arcane that most people (self included) are pushed to say what it is; the fifth element is aethyr (or ether) and is sometimes called spirit.

The amount of material written about the elements is enormous, and rather than reproduce in bulk what is relatively well-known I will provide a rough outline so that those readers who aren't familiar with Kabbalah will realize I am talking about approximately the same thing as they have seen before. A detailed description of the traditional

medieval view of the four elements can be found in "The Magus" [2]. The hierarchy of elemental powers can be found in "777" [4] and in Golden Dawn material [5] - I have summarized a few useful items below:

Element	Fire	Air	Water	Earth
GodName	Elohim	Jehovah	Eheieh	Agla
Archangel	Michael	Raphael	Gabriel	Uriel
King	Djin	Paralda	Nichsa	Ghob
Elemental	Salamanders	Sylphs	Undines	Gnomes

It amused me to notice that the section on the elemental kingdoms in Farrar's "What Witches Do" [6] had been taken by Alex Saunders lock, stock and barrel from traditional Cabalistic and CM sources.

The elements in Malkuth are arranged as follows:

```
                    South
                       Fire

            East          Zenith Aethyr+    West
            Air           Nadir  Aethyr-    Water

                          North
                          Earth
```

I have rotated the cardinal points through 180 degrees from their customary directions so that it is easier to see how the elements fit on the lower face of the Tree of Life:

```
                  Tiphereth
                       Fire

            Hod           Yesod          Netzach
            Air           Aethyr          Water

                        Malkuth
                         Earth
```

It is important to distinguish between the elements in Malkuth, where we are talking about real substance (the water in your body, the breath in your lungs), and the elements on the Tree, where we are using traditional correspondences *associated* with the elements, e.g.:

Earth:	solid, stable, practical, down-to-earth
Water:	sensitive, intuitive, emotional, caring, fertile
Air:	vocal, communicative, intellectual
Fire:	energetic, daring, impetuous
Positive Aethyr:	glue, binding, plastic
Negative Aethyr:	unbinding, dissolution, disintegration

Aethyr or Spirit is enigmatic, and I tend to think of it in terms of the forces which bind matter together. It is almost certainly a coincidence (but nevertheless interesting) that there are four fundamental forces - gravitational, electromagnetic, weak nuclear & strong nuclear - known to date, and current belief is that they can be unified into one fundamental force. On a slightly more arcane tack, Barret [2] has this to say about Aethyr:

> "Now seeing that the soul is the essential form, intelligible and incorruptible, and is the first mover of the body, and is moved itself; but that the body, or matter, is of itself unable and unfit for motion, and does very much degenerate from the soul, it appears that there is a need of a more excellent medium:- now such a medium is conceived to be the spirit of the world, or that which some call a quintessence; because it is not from the four elements, but a certain first thing, having its being above and beside them. There is, therefore, such a kind of medium required to be, by which celestial souls [e.g. forms] may be joined to gross bodies, and bestow upon them wonderful gifts. This spirit is in the same manner, in the body of the world, as our spirit is in our bodies; for as the powers of our soul are communicated to the members of the body by the medium of the spirit, so also the virtue of the soul of the world is diffused, throughout all things, by the medium of the universal spirit; for there is nothing to be found in the whole world that hath not a spark of the virtue thereof."

Aethyr underpins the elements like a foundation and its attribution to Yesod should be obvious, particularly as it forms the linking role between the ideoplastic world of "the Astral Light" [8] and the material world. Aethyr is often thought to come in two flavors - positive Aethyr, which binds, and negative Aethyr, which unbinds. Negative Aethyr is a bit like the Universal Solvent, and requires as much care in handling ;-}

Working with the physical elements in Malkuth is one of the most important areas of applied magic, dealing as it does with the basic constituents of the real world. The physical elements are tangible and can be experience in a very direct way through recreations such as caving, diving, parachuting or firewalking; they bite back in a suitably humbling way, and they provide CMs with an opportunity to join the neo-pagans in the great outdoors. Our bodies themselves are made from physical stuff, and there are many Raja Yoga-like exercises which can be carried out using the elements as a basis for work on the body. If you can stand his manic intensity (Exercise 1: boil an egg by force of will) then Bardon [9] is full of good ideas.

Malkuth is often associated with various kinds of intrinsic evil, and to understand this attitude (which I do not share) it is necessary to confront the same question as thirteenth century Kabbalists: can God be evil? The answer to this question was (broadly speaking) "yes", but Kabbalists have gone through many strange gyrations in an attempt to avoid what was for many an unacceptable conclusion. It was difficult to accept that famine, war, disease, prejudice, hate, death could be a part of a perfect being, and there had to be some way to account for evil which did not contaminate divine perfection. One approach was to sweep evil under the carpet, and in this case the carpet was Malkuth. Malkuth became the habitation for evil spirits.

If one examines the structure of the Tree without prejudice then it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that evil is quite adequately accounted for, and there is no need to shuffle evil to the periphery of the Tree like a cleaner without a dustpan. The emanation of any sephirah from Chokhmah downwards can manifest as good or evil depending on circumstances and the point of view of those affected by the energy involved. This appears to have been understood even at the time of the writing of the "Zohar", where the mercy of God is constantly contrasted with the severity of God, and the author makes it clear that one has to balance the other - you cannot have the mercy without the severity. On the other hand, the severity of God is persistently identified with the rigors of existence (form, finiteness, limitation), and while it is true that many of the things which have been identified with evil are a consequence of the finiteness of things, of being finite beings in a world of finite resources governed by natural laws with inflexible causality, it not correct to infer (as some have) that form itself is *intrinsically* evil.

The notion that form and matter are *intrinsically* evil, or in some way imperfect or not a part of God, may have reached Kabbalah from a number of sources. Scholem comments:

> "The Kabbalah of the early thirteenth century was the offspring of a union between an older and essentially Gnostic tradition represented by the book "Bahir", and the comparatively modern element of Jewish Neo-Platonism."

There is the possibility that the Kabbalists of Provence (who wrote or edited the "Sepher Bahir") were influenced by the Cathars, a late form of Manicheanism. Whether the source was Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, Manicheanism or some combination of all three, Kabbalah has imported a view of matter and form which distorts the view of things portrayed by the Tree of Life, and so Malkuth ends up as a kind of cosmic outer darkness, a bin for all the dirt, detritus, broken sephira and dirty hankies of the creation. Form is evil, the Mother of Form is female, women are definitely and indubitably evil, and Malkuth is the most female of the sephira, therefore Malkuth is most definitely evil quod erat demonstrandum. By the time we reach the time of S.L. Mathers and the Golden Dawn there is a complete Tree of evil demonic Klippoth *underneath* Malkuth as a reflection of the "good" Tree above it. I believe this may have something to do with the fact that meditations on Malkuth can easily become meditations on Binah, and meditations on Binah have a habit of slipping into the Abyss, and once in the Abyss it is easy to trawl up enough junk to "discover" an averse Tree "underneath" Malkuth. This view of the Klippoth, or Shells, as active, demonic evil has become pervasive, and the more energy people put into the demonic Tree, the less there is for the original. Abolish the Klippoth as demonic forces, and the Tree of Life comes alive with its full power of good *and* evil. The following quotation from Bischoff [10] (speaking of the Sephiroth) provides a more rational view of the Klippoth:

> "Since their energy [of the sephiroth] shows three degrees of strength (highest, middle and lowest degree), their emanations group accordingly in sequence. We usually imagine the image of a descending staircase. The Kabbalist prefers to see this fact as a decreasing alienation of the central primeval energy. Consequently any less perfect emanation is to him the cover or shell (Klippah) of the preceding, and so the last (furthest) emanations being the so-called material things are the shell of the total and are therefore called (in the actual sense) Klippoth."

This is my own view; the shell of something is the accretion of form which it accumulates as energy comes down the Lightning Flash. If the shell can be considered by itself then it is a dead husk of something which could be alive - it preserves all the structure but there is no energy in it to bring it alive. With this interpretation the Klippoth are to be found everywhere: in relationships, at work, at play, in ritual, in society. Whenever something dies and people refuse to recognize that it is dead, and cling to the lifeless husk of whatever it was, then you get a Klippah. For this reason one of the vices of Malkuth is Avarice, not only in the sense of trying to acquire material things, but also in the sense of being unwilling to let go of anything, even when it has become dead and worthless. The Klippah of Malkuth is what you would get if the Sun went out: Stasis, life frozen into immobility.

The other vice of Malkuth is Inertia, in the sense of "active resistance to motion; sluggish; disinclined to move or act". It is visible in most people at one time or another, and tends to manifest when a task is new, necessary, but not particularly exciting, there is no excitement or "natural energy" to keep one fired up, and one has to keep on pushing right to the finish. For this reason the obligation of Malkuth is (has to be) self-discipline.

The virtue of Malkuth is Discrimination, the ability to perceive differences. The ability to perceive differences is a necessity for any living organism, whether a bacteria able to sense the gradient of a nutrient or a kid working out how much money to wheedle out of his parents. As Malkuth is the final realization of form, it is the sphere where our ability to distinguish between differences is most pronounced. The capacity to discriminate is so fundamental to survival that it works overtime and finds boundaries and distinctions everywhere - "you" and "me", "yours" and "mine", distinctions of "property" and "value" and "territory" which are intellectual abstractions on one level (i.e. not real) and fiercely defended realities on another (i.e. very real indeed). I am not going to attempt a definition of real and unreal, but it is the case that much of what we think of as real is unreal, and much of what we think of as unreal is real, and we need the same discrimination which leads us into the mire to lead us out again. Some people think skin color is a real measure of intelligence; some don't. Some people think gender is a real measure of ability; some don't. Some people judge on appearances; some don't. There is clearly a difference between a bottle of beer and a bottle of piss, but is the color of the *bottle* important? What *is* important?

What differences are real, what matters? How much energy do we devote to things which are "not real". Am I able to perceive how much I am being manipulated by a fixation on unreality? Are my goals in life "real", or will they look increasingly silly and immature as I grow older? For that matter, is Kabbalah "real"? Does it provide a useful model of reality, or is it the remnant of a world-view which should have been put to rest centuries ago? One of the primary exercises of an initiate into Malkuth is a thorough examination of the question "What is real?".

The Spiritual Experience of Malkuth is variously the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel (HGA), or the Vision of the HGA (depending on who you believe). I vote for the Vision of the HGA in Malkuth, and the Knowledge and Conversation in Tiphereth. What is the HGA? According to the Gnosticism of Valentinus each person has a guardian angel who accompanies that individual throughout their life and reveals the gnosis; the angel is in a sense the divine Self. This belief is identical to what I was taught by the person who taught me Kabbalah, so some part of Gnosticism lives on. The current tradition concerning the HGA almost certainly entered the Western Esoteric Tradition as a consequence of S.L. Mather's translation [11] of "The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage", which contains full details of a lengthy ritual to attain the Knowledge and Conversation of the HGA. This ritual has had an important influence on twentieth century magicians and it is often attempted and occasionally completed.

The powers of Malkuth are invoked by means of the names Adonai ha Aretz and Adonai Melekh, which mean "Lord of the World" and "The Lord who is King" respectively. The power is transmitted through the world of Creation by the archangel Sandalphon, who is sometimes referred to as "the Long Angel", because his feet are in Malkuth and his head in Kether, which gives him an opportunity to chat to Metatron, the Angel of the Presence. The angel order is the Ashim, or Ishim, sometimes translated as the "souls of fire", supposedly the souls of righteous men and women.

In concluding this section on Malkuth, it worth emphasizing that I have chosen deliberately not to explore some major topics because there are sufficient threads for anyone with an interest to pick up and follow for themselves. The image of Malkuth as Mother Earth provides a link between Kabbalah and a numinous archetype with a deep significance for some. The image of Malkuth as physical substance provides a link into the sciences, and it is the case that at the limits of theoretical physics one's intuitions seem to be slipping and sliding on the same reality as in Kabbalah. The image of Malkuth as the sphere of the elements is the key to a large body of practical magical technique which varies from yoga-like concentration on the bodily elements, to nature-oriented work in the great outdoors. Lastly, just as the design of a building reveals much about its builders, so Malkuth can reveal a great deal about Kether - the bottom of the Tree and the top have much in common.

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Chapter 4: The Sephiroth (continued)

This chapter provides a detailed look at each of the ten sephiroth and draws together material scattered over previous chapters.

Yesod

Yesod means "foundation", and that is what Yesod is: it is the hidden infrastructure whereby the emanations from the remainder of the Tree are transmitted to the sephira Malkuth. Just as a large building has its air-conditioning ducts, service tunnels, conduits, electrical wiring, hot and cold water pipes, attic spaces, lift shafts, winding rooms, storage tanks, a telephone exchange etc, so does the Creation, and the external, visible world of phenomenal reality rests (metaphorically speaking) upon a hidden foundation of occult machinery. Meditations on the nature of Yesod tend to be full of secret tunnels and concealed mechanisms, as if the Creation was a Gothic mansion with a secret door behind every mirror, a passage in every wall, a pair of hidden eyes behind every portrait, and a subterranean world of forgotten tunnels leading who knows where. For this reason the Spiritual Experience of Yesod is aptly named "The Vision of the Machinery of the Universe".

Many Yesod correspondences reinforce this notion of a foundation, of something which lies behind, supports and gives shape to phenomenal reality. The magical image of Yesod is of "a beautiful naked man, very strong". The image which springs to mind is that of a man with the world resting on his shoulders, like one of the misrepresentations of the Titan Atlas (who actually held up the heavens, not the world). The angel order of Yesod is the Cherubim, the Strong Ones, the archangel is Gabriel, the Strong or Mighty One of God, and the God-name is Shaddai el Chai, the Almighty Living God.

The idea of a foundation suggests that there is a substance which lies behind physical matter and "in-forms it" or "holds it together", something less structured, more plastic, more refined and rarified, and this "fifth element" is often called aethyr. I will not attempt to justify aethyr in terms of current physics (the closest concept I have found is the hypothesized Higgs field); it is a convenient handle on a concept which has enormous intuitive appeal to many magicians, who, when asked how magic works, tend to think in terms of a medium which is directly receptive to the will, something which is plastic and can be shaped through concentration and imagination, and which transmits their artificially created forms into reality. Eliphas Levi called this medium the "Astral Light". It is also natural to imagine that mind, consciousness, and the soul have their habitation in this substance, and there are volumes detailing the properties of the "Etheric Body", the "Astral Body", the "Causal Body" [1,2] and so on. I don't take this stuff too seriously, but I do like to work with the kind of natural intuitions which occur spontaneously and independently in a large number of people - there is power in these intuitions - and it is a mistake to invalidate them because they sound cranky. When I talk about aethyr or the Astral Light, I mean there is an ideoplastic substance which is subjectively real to many magicians, and explanations of magic at the level of Yesod revolve around manipulating this substance using desire, imagination and will.

The fundamental nature of Yesod is that of *interface*; it interfaces the rest of the Tree of Life to Malkuth. The interface is bi-directional; there are impulses coming down from Kether, and echoes bouncing back from Malkuth. The idea of interface is illustrated in the design of a computer system: a computer with a multitude of worlds hidden within it is a source of heat and repair bills unless it has peripheral interfaces and device drivers to interface the world outside the computer to the world "inside" it; add a keyboard and a mouse and a monitor and a printer and you

have opened the door into another reality. Our own senses have the same characteristic of being a bi-directional interface through which we experience the world, and for this reason the senses correspond to Yesod, and not only the five traditional senses - the "sixth sense" and the "second sight" are given equal status, and so Yesod is also the sphere of instinctive psychism, of clairvoyance, precognition, divination and prophecy. It is also clear from accounts of lucid dreaming (and personal experience) that we possess the ability to perceive an inner world as vividly as the outer, and so to Yesod belongs the inner world of dreams, daydreams and vivid imagination, and one of the titles of Yesod is "The Treasure House of Images".

To Yesod is attributed Levanah, the Moon, and the lunar associations of tides, flux and change, occult influence, and deeply instinctive and sometimes atavistic behavior - possession, mediumship, lycanthropy and the like. Although Yesod is the foundation and it has associations with strength, it is by no means a rigid scaffold supporting a world in stasis. Yesod supports the world just as the sea supports all the life which lives in it and sails upon it, and just as the sea has its irresistible currents and tides, so does Yesod. Yesod is the most "occult" of the sephiroth, and next to Malkuth it is the most magical, but compared with Malkuth its magic is of a more subtle, seductive, glamorous and ensnaring kind. Magicians are drawn to Yesod by the idea that if reality rests on a hidden foundation, then by changing the foundation it is possible to change the reality. The magic of Yesod is the magic of form and appearance, not substance; it is the magic of illusion, glamour, transformation, and shape-changing. The most sophisticated examples of this are to be found in modern marketing, advertising and image consultancies. I do not jest. My tongue is not even slightly in my cheek. The following quote was taken from this morning's paper [3]:

Although the changes look cosmetic, those responsible for creating corporate image argue that a redesign of a company's uniform or name is just the visible sign of a much larger transformation.

> "The majority of people continue to misunderstand and think that it is just a logo, rather than understanding that a corporate identity programme is actually concerned with the very commercial objective of having a strong personality and single-minded, focussed direction for the whole organization, " said Fiona Gilmore, managing director of the design company Lewis Moberly. "It's like planting an acorn and then a tree grows. If you create the right *foundation* (my itals) then you are building a whole culture for the future of an organization."

I don't know what Ms. Gilmore studies in her spare time, but the idea that it is possible to manipulate reality by manipulating symbols and appearances is entirely magical. The same article on corporate identity continues as follows:

> "The scale of the BT relaunch is colossal. The new logo will be painted on more than 72,000 vehicles and trailers, as well as 9,000 properties. The company's 92,000 public payphones will get new decals, and its 90 shops will have to changed, right down to the yellow door handles. More than 50,000 employees are likely to need new uniforms or "image clothing".

Note the emphasis on *image*. The company in question (British Telecom) is an ex-public monopoly with an appalling customer relations problem, so it is changing the color of its door handles! This is Yesodic magic on a gigantic scale.

The image manipulators gain most of their power from the mass-media. The mass-media correspond to two sephiroth: as a medium of communication they belong in Hod, but as a foundation for our perception of reality they belong in Yesod. Nowadays most people form their model of what the world (in the large) is like via the media. There are a few individuals who travel the world sufficiently to have a model based on personal experience, but for most people their model of what most of the world is like is formed by newspapers, radio and television; that is, the media have become an extended (if inaccurate) instrument of perception. Like our "normal" means of perception the media are highly selective in the variety and content of information provided, and they can be used by advertising agencies and other manipulative individuals to create foundations for new collective realities.

While on the subject of changing perception to assemble new realities, the following quote by "Don Juan" [4] has a definite Cabalistic flavour:

> "The next truth is that perception takes place," he went on, "because there is in each of us an agent called the assemblage point that selects internal and external emanations for alignment. The particular alignment that we perceive as the world is the product of a specific spot where our assemblage point is located on our cocoon."

One of the titles of Yesod is "The Receptacle of the Emanations", and its function is precisely as described above - Yesod is the assemblage point which assembles the emanations of the internal and the external.

In addition to the deliberate, magical manipulation of foundations, there are other important areas of magic relevant to Yesod. Raw, innate psychism is an ability which tends to improve as more attention is devoted to creative visualization, focussed meditation (on Tarot cards for example), dreams (e.g. keeping a dream diary), and divination. Divination is an important technique to practice even if you feel you are terrible at it (and especially if you think it is nonsense), because it reinforces the idea that it is permissible to "let go" and intuits meanings into any pattern. Many people have difficulty doing this, feeling perhaps that they will be swamped with unreason (recalling Freud's fear, expressed to Jung, of needing a bulwark against the "black mud of occultism"), when in reality their minds are swamped with reason and could use a holiday. Any divination system can be used, but systems which emphasize pure intuition are best (e.g. Tarot, runes, tea-leaves, flights of birds, patterns on the wallpaper, smoke. I heard of a Kabbalist who threw a cushion into the air and carried out divination on the basis of the number of pieces of foam stuffing which fell out). Because Yesod is a kind of aethyric reflection of the physical world, the image of and precursor to reality, mirrors are an important tool for Yesod magic. Quartz crystals are also used, probably because of the use of crystal balls for divination, but also because quartz crystal and amethyst have a peculiarly Yesodic quality in their own right. The average New Age shop filled with crystals, Tarot cards, silver jewelry (lunar association), perfumes, dreamy music, and all the glitz, glamour and glitter of a demonic magpie's nest, is like a temple to Yesod. Mirrors and crystals are used passively as foci for receptivity, but they can also be used actively for certain kinds of aethyric magic - there is an interesting book on making and using magic mirrors which builds on the kind of elemental magical work carried out in Malkuth [5].

Yesod has an important correspondence with the sexual organs. The correspondence occurs in three ways. The first way is that when the Tree of Life is placed over the human body, Yesod is positioned over the genitals. The author of the Zohar is quite explicit about "the remaining members of the Microprosopus", to the extent that the relevant paragraphs in Mather's translation of "The Lesser Holy Assembly" remain in Latin to avoid offending Victorian sensibilities.

The second association of Yesod with the genitals arises from the union of the Microprosopus and his Bride. This is another recurring theme in Kabbalah, and the symbolism is complex and refers to several distinct ideas, from the relationship between man and wife to an internal process within the body of God: e.g [6].

> "When the Male is joined with the Female, they both constitute one complete body, and all the Universe is in a state of happiness, because all things receive blessing from their perfect body. And this is an Arcanum."

or, referring to the Bride:

> "And she is mitigated, and receiveth blessing in that place which is called the Holy of Holies below."

or, referring to the "member":

> "And that which floweth down into that place where it is congregated, and which is emitted through that most holy Yesod, Foundation, is entirely white, and therefore is it called Chesed.

> Thence Chesed entereth into the Holy of Holies; as it is written Ps. cxxxiii. 3 'For there Tetragrammaton commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.'"

It is not difficult to read a great deal into paragraphs like this, and there are many more in a similar vein. Suffice to say that the Microprosopus is often identified with the sephira Tiphereth, the Bride is the sephira Malkuth, and the point of union between them is obviously Yesod.

The third and more abstract association between Yesod and the sexual organs arises because the sexual organs are a mechanism for perpetuating the *form* of a living organism. In order to get close to what is happening in sexual reproduction it is worth asking the question "What is a computer program?". Well, a computer program indisputably begins as an idea; it is not a material thing. It can be written down in various ways; as an abstract specification in set theoretic notation akin to pure mathematics, or as a set of recursive functions in lambda calculus; it could be written in several different high level languages - Pascal, C, Prolog, LISP, ADA, ML etc. Are they all they same program? Computer scientists wrestle with this problem: can we show that two different programs written in two different languages are in some sense functionally identical? It isn't trivial to do this because it asks fundamental questions about language (any language) and meaning, but it is possible in limited cases to produce two apparently different programs written in different languages and assert that they are identical. Whatever the program is, it seems to exist independently of any particular language, so what is the program and where is it? Let us ignore that chestnut and go on to the next level. Suppose we write the program down. We could do it with a pencil. We could punch holes in paper. We could plant trees in a pattern in a field. We can line up magnetic domains. We can burn holes in metal foil. I could have it tattooed on my back. We can transform it into radically different forms (that is what compilers and assemblers do). It obviously isn't tied to any physical representation either. What about the computer it runs on? Well, it could be a conventional one made with CMOS chips etc but aren't there a lot of different kinds and makes of computer, and they can all run the same program. It is also quite practical to build computers which *don't* use electrons - you could use mechanics or fluids or ball bearings - all you need to do is produce something with the functionality of a Turing machine, and that isn't hard. So not only is the program not tied

to any particular physical representation, but the same goes for the computer itself, and what we are left with is two puffs of smoke. On another level this is crazy; computers are real, they do real things in the real world, and the programs which make them work are obviously real too aren't they?

Now apply the same kind of scrutiny to living organisms, and the mechanism of reproduction. Take a good look at nucleic acids, enzymes, proteins etc., and ask the same kind of questions. I am not implying that life is a sort of program, but what I am suggesting is that if you try to get close to what constitutes a living organism you end up with another puff of smoke and a handful of atoms which could just as well be ball-bearings or fluids or The thing that is being perpetuated through sexual reproduction is something quite abstract and immaterial; it is an abstract form preserved and encoded in a particular pattern of chemicals, and if I was asked which was more real, the transient collection of chemicals used, or the abstract form itself, I would answer "the form". But then, I am a programmer, and I would say that.

I find it astonishing that there are any hard-core materialists left in the world. All the important stuff seems to exist at the level of puffs of smoke, what Kabbalists call form. Roger Penrose, one of the most eminent mathematicians living has this to say [7]:

> "I have made no secret of the fact that my sympathies lie strongly with the Platonic view that mathematical truth is absolute, external and eternal, and not based on man-made criteria; and that mathematical objects have a timeless existence of their own, not dependent on human society nor on particular physical objects."

"Ah Ha!" cry the materialists, "At least the atoms are real." Well, they are until you start pulling them apart with tweezers and end up with a heap of equations which turn out to be the linguistic expression of an idea. As Einstein said, "The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible", that is, capable of being described in some linguistic form.

I am not trying to convince anyone of the "rightness" of the Cabalistic viewpoint. What I am trying to do is show that the process whereby form is impressed on matter (the relationship between Yesod and Malkuth) is not arcane, theosophical mumbo- jumbo; it is an issue which is alive and kicking, and the closer we get to "real things" (and that certainly includes living organisms), the better the Cabalistic model (that form precedes manifestation, that there is a well-defined process of formation with the "real world" as an outcome) looks.

The illusion of Yesod is security, the kind of security which forms the foundation of our personal existence in the world. On a superficial level our security is built out of relationships, a source of income, a place to live, a vocation, personal power and influence etc, but at a deeper level the foundation of personal identity is built on a series of accidents, encounters and influences which create the illusion of who we are, what we believe in, and what we stand for. There is a warm, secure feeling of knowing what is right and wrong, of doing the right thing, of living a worthwhile life in the service of worthwhile causes, of having a uniquely privileged vantage point from which to survey the problems of life (with all the intolerance and incomprehension of other people which accompanies this insight), and conversely there are feelings of despair, depression, loss of identity, and existential terror when a crack forms in the illusion, and reality shows through - Castaneda calls it "the crack in the world". The smug, self-perpetuating illusion which masquerades as personal identity at the level of Yesod is the most astoundingly difficult thing to shift or destroy. It fights back with all the resources of the personality, it will enthusiastically embrace any ally which will help to shore up its defenses - religious, political or scientific ideology; psychological, sociological, metaphysical and theosophical claptrap (e.g. Kabbalah); the law and popular morality; in fact, any beliefs which give it the power to retain its identity, uniqueness and integrity. Because this parasite of the soul uses religion (and its esoteric offshoots) to sustain itself they have little or no power over it and become a major part of the problem.

There are various ways of overcoming this personal demon (Carroll [8], in an essay on the subject, calls it Choronzon), and the two I know best are the cataclysmic and the abrasive. The first method involves a shock so extreme that it is impossible to be the same person again, and if enough preparation has gone before then it is possible to use the shock to rebuild oneself. In some cases this doesn't happen; I have noticed that many people with very rigid religious beliefs talk readily about having suffered traumatic experiences, and the phenomenon of hysterical conversion among soldiers suffering from war neuroses is well known. The other method, the abrasive, is to wear away the demon of self-importance, to grind it into nothing by doing (for example) something for someone else for which one receives no thanks, praise, reward, or recognition. The task has to be big enough and awful enough to become a demon in its own right and induce all the correct feelings of compulsion (I have to do this), helplessness (I'll never make it), indignation (what's the point, it's not my problem anyway), rebellion (I won't, I won't, not anymore), more compulsion (I can't give up), self-pity (how did I get into this?), exhaustion (Oh No! Not again!), despair (I can't go on), and finally a kind of submission when one's demon hasn't the energy to put up a struggle any more and simply gives up. The woman who taught me Kabbalah used both the cataclysmic and the abrasive methods on her students with malicious glee - I will discuss this in more detail in the section on Tiphereth.

The virtue of Yesod is independence, the ability to make our own foundations, to continually rebuild ourselves, to reject the security of comfortable illusions and confront reality without blinking.

The vice of Yesod is idleness. This can be contrasted with the inertia of Malkuth. A stone is inert because it lacks the capacity to change, but in most circumstances people can change and can't be bothered. At least, not today. Yesod has a dreamy, illusory, comfortable, *seductive* quality, as in the Isle of the Lotus Eaters - how else could we live as if death and personal annihilation only happened to other people?

The Klippothic aspect of Yesod occurs when foundations are rotten and disintegrating and only the superficial appearance remains unchanged - Dorian Gray springs to mind, or cases where the brain is damaged and the body remains and carries out basic instinctive functions, but the person is dead as far as other people are concerned. Organizations are just as prone to this as people.

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